REMARKS

The Examiner rejected Claims 1, 3, 5, 7-9, and 11 under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by the Sanchez et al. reference, U.S. Patent No. 5,756,026. The Examiner also rejected Claims 2, 4, 6, 10, and 12-20 under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over the Sanchez et al. reference. These rejections are respectfully traversed.

Claim 1 defines the invention as a method of manufacturing a vehicle trim component including the steps of providing a thermoplastic substrate and providing a first material. The first material is different from the material of the thermoplastic substrate. A portion of a surface of the thermoplastic substrate is exposed to a source of heat such that the portion of the surface of the thermoplastic substrate exposed to the source of heat is melted. The first material is then positioned onto the thermoplastic substrate so as to bring the first material into contact with the melted surface of the thermoplastic substrate, thereby bonding the first material to the thermoplastic substrate and forming a vehicle trim component.

Claim 13 defines the invention as a method of manufacturing a vehicle trim component including the steps of providing a substrate and providing a first material comprising a first layer and a thermoplastic layer. A portion of a surface of the thermoplastic layer of the first material is exposed to a source of heat such that the portion of the surface of the thermoplastic layer exposed to the source of heat is melted. The first material is then positioned onto the substrate so as to bring the melted surface of the thermoplastic layer into contact with the substrate, thereby bonding the first material to the substrate and forming a vehicle trim component.

Claim 20 defines the invention as a method of manufacturing a vehicle trim component including the steps of providing a press assembly having a first press half defining a first nest and a second press half defining a second nest. The press assembly is movable between an open position to expose the first and the second nests, and a closed position. A thermoplastic substrate is disposed into the first nest. A first material is disposed into the second nest. The first material is different from the material of the thermoplastic substrate. A source of high intensity heat is provided. The source of heat is moved relative to the thermoplastic substrate to expose a surface of the thermoplastic substrate to the source of heat such that within

the range of from about 0.001 inches to about 0.010 inches of the surface of the thermoplastic substrate exposed to the source of heat is melted. The press assembly is moved to the closed position so as to bring the melted surface of the thermoplastic substrate into contact with the first material, thereby bonding the first material to the thermoplastic substrate and forming a vehicle trim component.

In each of Claims 1, 13, and 20, the invention is defined as exposing at least a portion of a thermoplastic to heat, and positioning the first material and heated thermoplastic to be in contact with one another to bond the first material and the thermoplastic.

The Sanchez et al. reference discloses a fabric having a face fabric and a moldable backing coated on the face fabric. The Sanchez et al. reference does not disclose how the face fabric and moldable backing are bonded to one another except that the moldable backing is described as "coated" on the face fabric. See col. 4, lines 56-65. The Sanchez et al. reference lacks any teaching regarding exposing the thermoplastic to heat and then bringing it in contact with a substrate or other material to bond the thermoplastic to the substrate. Therefore, the Sanchez et al. reference does not teach exposing at least a portion of a thermoplastic to heat and positioning a first material and the heated thermoplastic in contact with one another to bond the first material and the thermoplastic to one another as defined in Claims 1, 13, and 20.

Further, the Sanchez et al. reference teaches coating the face fabric with a moldable backing with a lower melting point than the face fabric, such that the combination of the face fabric and moldable backing can be exposed to heat to melt the moldable backing, but not melt the face fabric. See col. 5, lines 4-20. Selecting a face fabric and moldable backing with respective melting points that allow the combination of the face fabric and moldable backing to be heated simultaneaously so that only the moldable backing melts teaches away from heating a thermoplastic prior to combining the thermoplastic with a first material. Therefore, the Sanchez et al. reference teaches away from the present invention as defined in each of the independent claims, Claims 1, 13, and 20.

The cited references do not describe the present invention nor would a person of ordinary skill in the art find it obvious to modify the cited reference as suggested by the Examiner. Accordingly, the invention as defined in the Claims is clearly

patentable over the cited reference. In view of the above remarks, the applicant respectfully requests that the rejections be withdrawn.